

Recommendation Form for Christine Spencer

Christine Spencer was recommended to MOVA's Spotlight Program by Deb Falzoi, a colleague and friend. The following was written by Ms. Falzoi.

A two-time survivor of rape, Christine has turned her anger and sadness into an inspiring and moving quilt that honors child victims and survivors of violence.

Christine has raised awareness for the prevention of cruelty to children and hopes to keep going to make the Innocence Quilt a national force in ending violence against children.

Christine's story is inspiring. In less than one year, she has taken an idea and has already moved others with her work. She is looking to help teens cope with violence in the healthy way that helped her - journal writing. She has turned an extremely negative experience into positive change.

Her sources of inspiration and support come from journal writing, forgiveness, a love of quilting, an idea from a volunteer, gaining support from the community - all of these factors seemed to have aligned to bring this idea to life.

All Spotlight victim-thrivers have an opportunity to respond to the information provided in the recommendation form and add any sources of inspiration for her/himself.

It is an honor to have been recommended for the MOVA Spotlight. There were many times over the years where I thought I would never be capable of experiencing many of the simple joys everyone else seemed to be able to do, because of the overwhelming sadness and day to day struggles to live with what I call "memories from hell!"

When I began my process of moving from victim to survivor, there were very few places to go for help in 1982. Within a few years, Ellen Bass and Laura Davis had published their book, "The Courage to Heal". Understanding that I was not alone was the most important step in my process. Support and encouragement is essential, and it is not always possible for that to come to us from those closest to us. Often times they are also victims. If not actual physical victims, they are too emotionally overwhelmed or wounded to be part of our support system. Ellen Bass and Laura Davis offered week-long retreats for women who were raped and/or beaten as children. Taking the risk to spend an entire week with other women such as myself was the beginning of moving forward. Eventually I was able to find a psychotherapist who ran groups for victims of childhood violence, and I made the commitment to attend twice weekly for as long as it took to heal the emotional wounds. For me that was a two-year long commitment. Again, the support and encouragement from peers as well as from an educated, trained psychotherapist was essential!

Understanding that others were in need of a compassionate person to listen, and able to give specific instruction on how to make themselves safe prompted me to go for the training program offered by my local Women's Center where I volunteered on the hotline and in the court system for two years. Again, staying involved and continuing to educate myself about domestic violence, the effects on children of violence, and simply looking into the eyes of innocent children, knowing they depend on adults to make them safe and protected, inspired me to do my part in making that happen. And there is still much work for us to do!

Since childhood I've always had a creative streak in me. During some of my most difficult times, I would use words to try to express my feelings. Throughout my entire process I kept a daily journal. It allowed me to express my feelings, get them out in a healthy way. My anger written out with pen and paper was safe. I could get it all out without hurting anybody else, and as a result, I wasn't turning to alcohol and/or drugs, burying my feelings or hurting my own self. My journals provided me with a record as well. I could look back over what I had written and gradually was able to progress healing within myself.

Any creative outlet helps in gaining self-confidence, joy and peace of mind. For me, I also enjoyed sewing. My grandmother and mother were quilters. I thought I'd try my hand at it also. I was enjoying the art of it, and actually began to make infant quilts as gifts and occasionally would sell one. Again, I was inspired to be able to bring warmth, comfort and a cozy feeling, safety to children. Then I was raped again!

Between my infant quilts and watching the news one night about yet another child gone missing and turned up murdered, I turned to a friend for an ear and received support. He suggested I make an honorary quilt for the little Jessica Lunsford of Florida.

My passion to do my part to make children, all children safe, escalated from one quilt for one murdered child to the idea of an honorary block for all children affected by violence. All children deserve to be safe!!

Through my contacts with the Massachusetts Sex Offenders Registry Board, Community Voices.Net and Jane Doe, Inc., I learned of the Missing Children's Day Ceremony at the State House. I attended with flyers about my idea of the Innocence Quilt. Some of the families of missing and/or murdered children decided they liked the idea of honoring their child with a block in the quilt. I had and continue to have so very much compassion and empathy for those who have lost a child to violence, specifically to the unnecessary crimes perpetrated by sex offenders.

Through many of the above mentioned as well as MOVA, I gained the support to follow through with the Innocence Quilt. I began to approach area businesses to see if it was something they would consider supporting and/or sponsoring. Again, it was reaching out for support, raising awareness of the pending legislation, and asking people to help me to make children safer from sex offenders and child beaters that I have gained inspiration and continue with my mission. I knew I couldn't do it all alone!

My church learned of my work to make children safer, and they too are a great support system in many ways. So many people want to do their part, but they are not really sure what to do or how to do it. I was unsure too until I had to take that risk and reach out to ask for help, reveal my "secret" and commit myself to do my part, for myself first, others later.

Deb Falzoi of Shift Gears Marketing of Plymouth donated the website design and other services; she is now the vice president of the Innocence Quilt. Other businesses have donated funds, much needed. Many women are cleaning out their fabric stashes and donating fabric. And as a result of the website - www.innocencequilt.org I am receiving emails from all over the country of people asking me to make a block to represent them or their child. Recently I received my first email from Canada - requesting a block to honor their child who was a victim of violence. This is all only in the first year!

The more support I receive from families affected by childhood violence (including rape) the more inspired I am to honor my commitment to all children! The more groups that contact me, asking me to come to speak to them about pending legislation that would make children safer, the more inspired I am. The more businesses who take up the safety of children as one of their causes or charities, the more inspired I am. And when I hear of one more teenager or child returned home and safe, dropped from the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children's website, the more inspired I am. This is my purpose in life, I am positive!

After I was raped at the age of 44, for the second time in my life, I wasn't sure I would be able to recover. It brought back in full force all of the memories of being raped at the age of six. I struggled greatly for the next 18 months or so. Although I found myself as a victim once again, with all of the same depression, sadness, mistrust, I also knew I was not a child!! Nothing is more difficult to overcome than childhood rape! Nothing!!! I had already done that, so I knew it was possible to overcome adult rape too. I had learned how to take back my power before. I knew I must do it once again. And I have. My power today comes from overcoming my experiences. My purpose today is in doing my part to ensure all children are safe from sexual predators and child beaters. My hope today is to raise enough awareness to bring home the point to our society that we are all responsible for the protection and safety of every child! My greatest source of inspiration and support has come from those who truly respect life! They are the angels!!